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UNCLAS QUITO 000599

SIPDIS

State, pass to Peace Corps.

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR LAUNCHES CHILD LABOR PROJECT AND VISITS
PEACE CORPS

¶1. Summary: On March 11, the Ambassador went to Cayambe, a flower-producing area north of Quito, to attend the inauguration of a U.S. Department of Labor-sponsored project to combat child labor in the banana and flower industries through an improved quality of education. The Ambassador then paid a welcome visit to the newest class of Peace Corps Trainees in Ayora. End Summary.

Ambassador Launches SOY! (Support Our Youth!) Education Initiative

¶2. The Ambassador went to the flower-producing town of Cayambe in Pichincha Province on March 11 to inaugurate a U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL)-sponsored project to combat child labor through education. USDOL has provided a \$3 million dollar grant, to be used over the next four years, to Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the project's executing agency. The project targets up to 17,000 people including children employed in the banana and flower industries, their parents and teachers in the provinces of Los Rios, Guayas, El Oro, Pichincha and Cotopaxi.

¶3. With estimates of nearly one-quarter of all children in Ecuador engaged in some form of child labor, many children do not receive the education that would otherwise allow them to succeed as adults. This has detrimental effects on entire communities and hinders Ecuador's economic growth. Thus, the project intends to promote community awareness, education initiatives to keep children in school, and ensure the successful transition of children to the secondary grades.

¶4. The Ambassador reiterated American support for the project and its goals, stressing continued U.S. assistance provided along many fronts, including Peace Corps volunteers, SOUTHCOM mobile medical brigades, and student exchanges. Other speakers present included the Minister of Labor, the Mayor of Cayambe, the CRS Country Representative, a flower industry representative and children from the affected communities. The television and print media were present in force, and the Ambassador gave a short press conference afterwards. Coverage was highly visible and favorable, thereby effectively promoting one of the project goals of raising community awareness of child labor in Ecuador.

Ambassador Welcomes Peace Corps Trainees

¶5. The Ambassador then went to visit the newest class of Peace Corps Trainees (PCTs) at the Peace Corps' Community Based Training (CBT) site in Ayora. The 38 trainees are currently enrolled in an 11-week language and technical training program. The Ambassador, as she has done on prior occasions, demonstrated mission support for the important work volunteers are engaged with in the field emphasizing that their "people-to-people" diplomacy paid off in spades.

Comment

¶6. Combating child labor through education in affected communities is cost-effective and productive. Child labor provides only short-term, modest income. An educated child, however, helps guarantee the long-term success of the family, the community and the country's greater economic prospects. Peace Corps Volunteers are an excellent source, as well, to help promote the message of the importance of continuing education. This demonstrates one way in which Peace Corps training, activities and work can be integrated into the larger goals of the U.S. mission.

KENNEY